

Unfolding Key Factors in Sustainability of Malay Traditional Food: A Systematic Analysis

Nur Nadia Maisarah Mohd Fisol, Ahmad Redhuan Abu Bakar, Mas Affandy Mashuri

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara Cawangan Pulau Pinang

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on hidden factors that help to sustain Malay traditional food among the Malay community in Malaysia. Application of comprehensive systematic analysis helps to identify these socio-cultural dynamics related to Malay traditional food and shed light on essential factors which help to preserve Malay traditional food until today's generation. This research implements systematic literature review based on PRISMA protocol and critical analysis from related previous studies. A systematic analysis based on PRISMA flow which includes record identification on database, record screening and exclusion process, assessing eligibility of articles and exclusion with reason and inclusion of articles for final synthesis. 11 articles were included for the final synthesis and the thematic result shows 9 keywords or codes as the main factors that help to sustain Malay traditional food among the Malay community. The factors consist of Intergenerational food knowledge, pre-preparation, cultural celebration, food practice, cooking method, cooking skills, authenticity, modernization and food decorum. The most prominent factors highlight that women as an important intergenerational food knowledge medium in the Malay community significantly helps the process of Malay traditional food knowledge transfer from one generation to another. The continuation of these factors in the cycle of the Malay community will ensure that Malay traditional food knowledge will keep its existence for generations to come.

Keywords: Sustainability, Malay Traditional Food, Knowledge Transfer and PRISMA Methodology

INTRODUCTION

Malay traditional food indicated by its cooking customs, cooking method, recipes and its staple ingredients that are essentials to Malay culture (Md. Sharif et al., 2018). The rich tapestry of Malay traditional food, with its unique flavors and culinary techniques, represents not only a vital part of Malaysia's cultural heritage but also a significant aspect of its social identity. This culinary food knowledge has been passed down from one generation to another in informal education scenarios (Mohd Suleiman et al., 2023). The processes generally occurred spontaneously and involved mothers and daughters (Md. Sharif et al., 2018), (M. Sharif et al., 2014). However, in recent years, there has been a growing concern regarding the sustainability of these traditional practices among the younger generation. As globalization and modernization influence lifestyle choices, dietary habits among Malaysians are shifting towards more convenient and fast-food options, often at the expense of traditional cuisine. The younger Malay generation nowadays lacked expertise and understanding of their traditional cuisine (M. S. M. Sharif, Nor, et al., 2015). Most younger generations solely rely on their mothers to make the delicacies, from the customary dessert known as kuih-muih to the major meals. Thus, Malay traditional food preservation within the Malay community will only be transmitted around the women circle (Shariff et al., 2022).

Research Gap

Despite existing research on Malay traditional food, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific factors and mechanisms that influence its sustainability. Current studies often highlight the threats posed by globalization and modernization (Mohd Suleiman et al., 2023) to the sustainability of Malay traditional food within the society. Provided with the fact that the younger Malay generation nowadays lacked expertise and understanding of their traditional cuisine (M. S. M. Sharif, Nor, et al., 2015). Malay traditional food knowledge was transmitted by women through the generation (Shariff et al., 2022). Yet, there is still a lack of critical analysis and systematic literature review on “What are the key factors in sustainability of Malay traditional food throughout the Malay community in Malaysia?”. Thus, it is an opportunity to explore the hidden factors that help to sustain Malay traditional food in Malaysia through the application of systematic review protocol.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malay Traditional Food

Malay traditional food can be distinguished by its distinctive cooking customs, cooking method, recipes and its staple ingredients that are essentials to Malay culture (Md. Sharif et al., 2018). Malay cooking uses a variety of spices. The long-gone traders from nearby nations like Indonesia, India, the Middle East, and China had a significant influence on the traditional Malay cuisine style. Due to the use of a melting pot of herbs and spices, Malay cuisine is frequently characterized as flavorful and spicy. The primary distinguishing factor in traditional Malay cuisine is its geographic location, as per the states. For instance, the northern states on the west coast are well-known for their fiery, spicy cuisine. This is due to Thailand's proximity to Kelantan (M. S. M. Sharif et al., 2016). Ingredients like lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, and daun pandan (screwpine leaves), bunga kantan (wild gingerbuds) daun kesum (Polygonum or laksa leaf), nutmeg, and kunyit (turmeric), star anise, cardamom, pepper, fenugreek, cumin and coriander are used in Malay cookery (M. S. M. Sharif et al., 2016).

Food Knowledge

Food knowledge is defined as oral transmission of knowledge concentrated on how food is being produced by the communities and ethnic groups from one generation to the next generation (M. S. M. Sharif et al., 2016). Transmission methods include oral tradition, practical experiences, direct observation, and eating the meals that the older generation taught the younger generation. Through fundamental cooking skills, ingredient selection, techniques, recipes, preparation method, and cooking tips, late generations' cultural ideas and methods for providing food are passed down (Mohd Suleiman et al., 2023), (M. S. M. Sharif et al., 2016). Food knowledge can be acquired in a variety of contexts, including by learning at home and from community members. On top of that, ethnic communities can share information and experiences about food and culture at social gatherings or festival celebrations after they are exposed to different eating customs (M. S. M. Sharif, Zahari, et al., 2015). A culture, ethnic group, or region's unique culinary customs and practices demonstrate the importance of food knowledge, particularly regarding traditional food specialties and cultural identity. Communities and ethnic groups play a major role to carry on and apply the food knowledge to the younger generation to make sure the cultural identity does not disappear throughout time (Md. Sharif et al., 2018), (M. S. M. Sharif et al., 2016).

Knowledge Transfer

The term knowledge transfer refers to a concentrated, one-way exchange of knowledge between mother and daughter, people, groups, or organizations in which the knowledge recipient possesses cognitive comprehension, the capacity to apply the knowledge, or both (M. S. M. Sharif et al., 2016). Throughout the process of knowledge transmission, a wide range of interactions occur between people, groups, and between groups and the organization. For Malay traditional food to remain sustainable over the long-term and be

preserved for future generations, there needs to be an intergenerational transfer of food knowledge. If this traditional dish is not fully comprehended and known, it may be forgotten to time and eventually become obsolete, which could result in its extinction. It is imperative that this information be regularly applied and passed on to the next generation (Mohd Suleiman et al., 2023). There is a significant relation between gender and food heritage additionally they understand the definition, criteria and type of traditional food (Ramli et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Preferred Reporting Items For Systematic Reviews And Meta-Analyses (Prisma)

The systematic reviews were conducted according to the reporting checklist in Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019). A systematic analysis based on several criteria which includes record identification on database, record screening and exclusion process, assessing eligibility of articles and exclusion with reason and inclusion of Malay traditional food knowledge transfer articles. The research starts by describing the rationale for the review according to the context of the research. Authors then construct a statement of question which addresses the 5 important elements in (PICOS) which are participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design. Additionally, a research question was formulated - "What are the key factors in sustainability of Malay traditional food throughout the Malay community in Malaysia"

Identification

Identification process in this research is through the identification process of past research that is aligned with the research question (Ab Talib et al., 2020). Based on the research question developed, several keywords were identified for database searching – "Sustainability" AND "Traditional" AND "Malay" AND "Food" AND "Knowledge Transfer". All respective key words were used in the database searching. Researcher identification or article sourcing started on 19th March 2024 and 3 reliable databases have been utilized for this research consisting of Science Direct, Web of Science and Google Scholar which application of advanced search helps to narrow down the list of articles and journals that are closest to support the research findings. Access for the respective database was from institutional subscription and articles were downloaded for selection and further screening (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019). Articles extracted from databases are indexed and the peer review process portrays the article quality control in terms of article content. At the end of the identification process, a total of 949 articles were identified through a search application provided in the database.

Screening

The screening process is the selection of articles by utilizing the screening function in the database search application. The early screening process was conducted by strictly observing the article keywords, title and abstract (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019). Additional screening requirements were included as part of the screening characteristics for instance year of publication, language and publication status which align with PRISMA guideline. As there are articles that cover the specific subject, it is not practical to perform in depth review and analyses. Thus, a rational exclusion characteristic is established by researchers to narrow down the outcome (Okoli, 2015). The screening process was done by two independent reviewers and screening was done according to the inclusion and exclusion criterias. This practice helped to ensure that the screening and selection of related articles were free from bias and only article content that answered the research question were applicable for the selection. A total of 949 articles were screened according to the criteria shown in Table 1. Only articles published within 2013 until 2023 of 10 years duration were eligible for this systematic review. An outcome of 11 selected articles were selected and exclusion of 837 articles which do not fulfill the criterias.

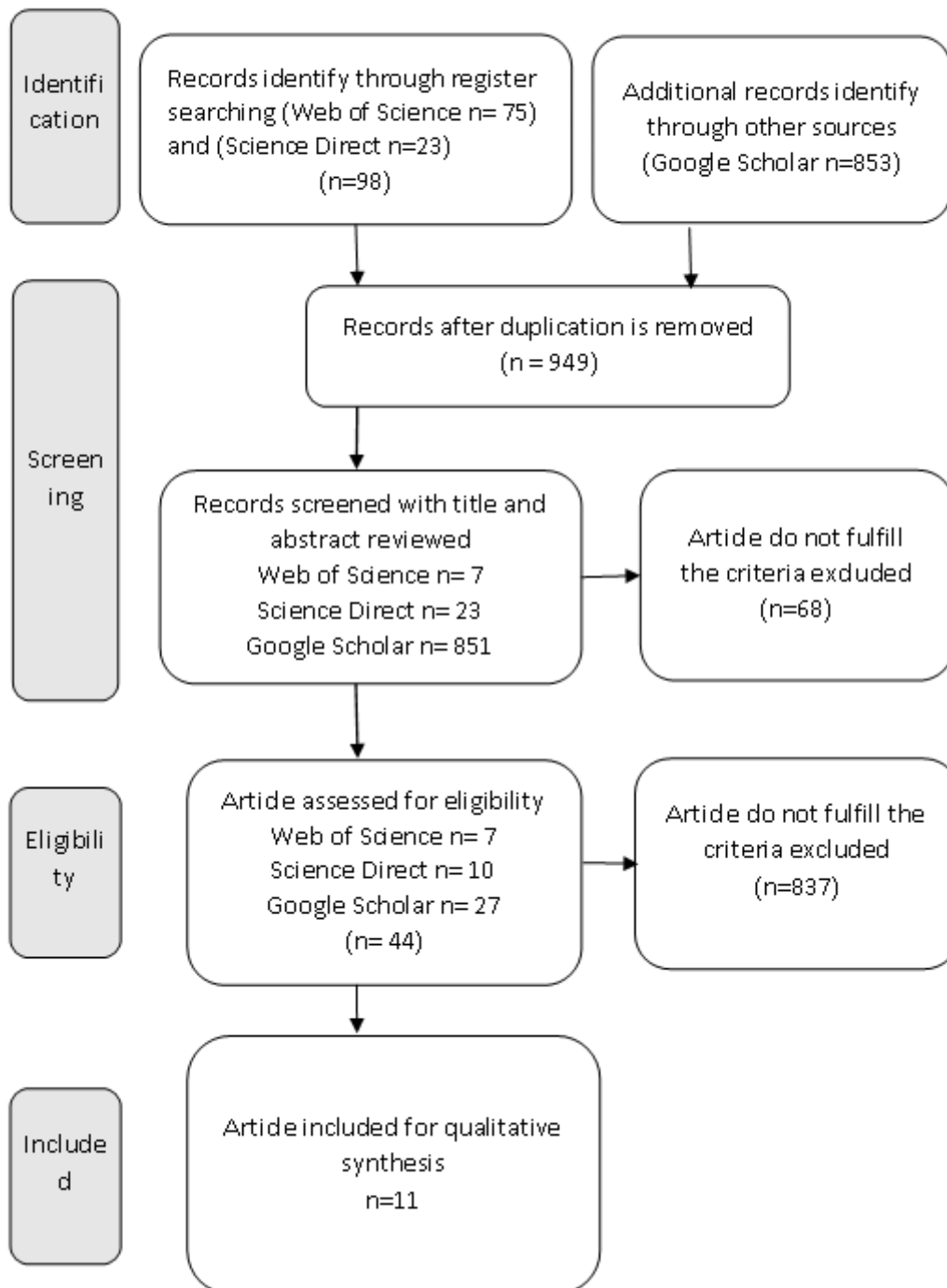


Figure 1: PRISMA Protocol Diagram

Eligibility

Eligibility process requires articles that fulfill the established characteristics shall be included into the systematic review. Articles include the study design of empirical study, quantitative, qualitative and systematic review articles. As early analysis was done by screening the articles titles and abstract, the preliminary analysis continued by analysis on each article's data and recorded to be imported into a data extraction table. Articles published in English and Bahasa Malaysia were under the required criteria and rationally an article content that does not discuss Malaysia as the geographic subject for Malay Traditional food will be eliminated. Data extraction will consist of the article study size, context, method, result and citation of the article. The articles that do not consist of and support the research question will be excluded. A total of 44 eligible articles were

analyzed for inclusion process. However, 33 articles were eliminated as the research focus and findings do not align with research questions. Final 11 articles will proceed to the synthesis process. Figure 1 explains the whole flow of the deductive process according to PRISMA protocol and inclusion and exclusion of articles number were recorded in the PRISMA Flow.

Table 1: Data inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2013 until 2023	Records below 2013 and 2024
Document type	Article journal Empirical study and conference, peer review journal	Business article, letter, editorial, conference review, note, book.
Language	English and Bahasa Malaysia	Other than English and Bahasa Malaysia
Region	Malaysia	Other Than Malaysia
Choice of Article	Random selection of article base on keyword search in database	Article others than the keyword searching
Search option	Web of Science, Science Direct, and Google Scholar	Other than these three databases.
Keywords	“Sustainability” AND “Traditional” AND “Malay” AND “Food” AND “Knowledge Transfer”	Keywords that are not suggested by
Search for relevance	Title and abstract of each article	All the unclear articles title and abstract
Final selection	Only article related to challenges in sustaining/preserving Malay traditional food	Articles which are not providing the information related to the topic.

FINDING

Final 11 articles included for synthesis focusing on sustainability of Traditional Malay Food have been portrayed in Figure 1. The analysis is able to conclude with the thematic result of 9 factors in sustainability of Traditional Malay Food. These factors consist of Intergenerational food knowledge, pre-preparation, cultural celebration, food practice, cooking method, cooking skills, authenticity, modernization and food decorum. The most unique factors highlight women as an important intergenerational food knowledge medium in the Malay community significantly helps the process of Malay traditional food knowledge transfer from one generation to another. Pre-preparation highlights the importance of knowledge transfer through the process of sourcing of ingredients where younger generations accompany their mother or elders buying food ingredients and familiarizing food components and recipes. Food practice indicates that Malay traditional food knowledge transfer will only be successful if there were physical practice and repetitive action in cooking the food. After all, old folks do highlight that “practice makes perfect”. Participating in Malay traditional ceremonies and traditional cultural events helps the preservation of Malay traditional food where the young generation has the opportunity to observe and taste Malay traditional food that are specific to certain cultural events such as Malay wedding and Hari Raya festival. The remaining factors show equal weight of significant value in helping to preserve Malay traditional food as authenticity, modernization, cooking method, cooking skill and food decorum were among factors highlighted by previous research.

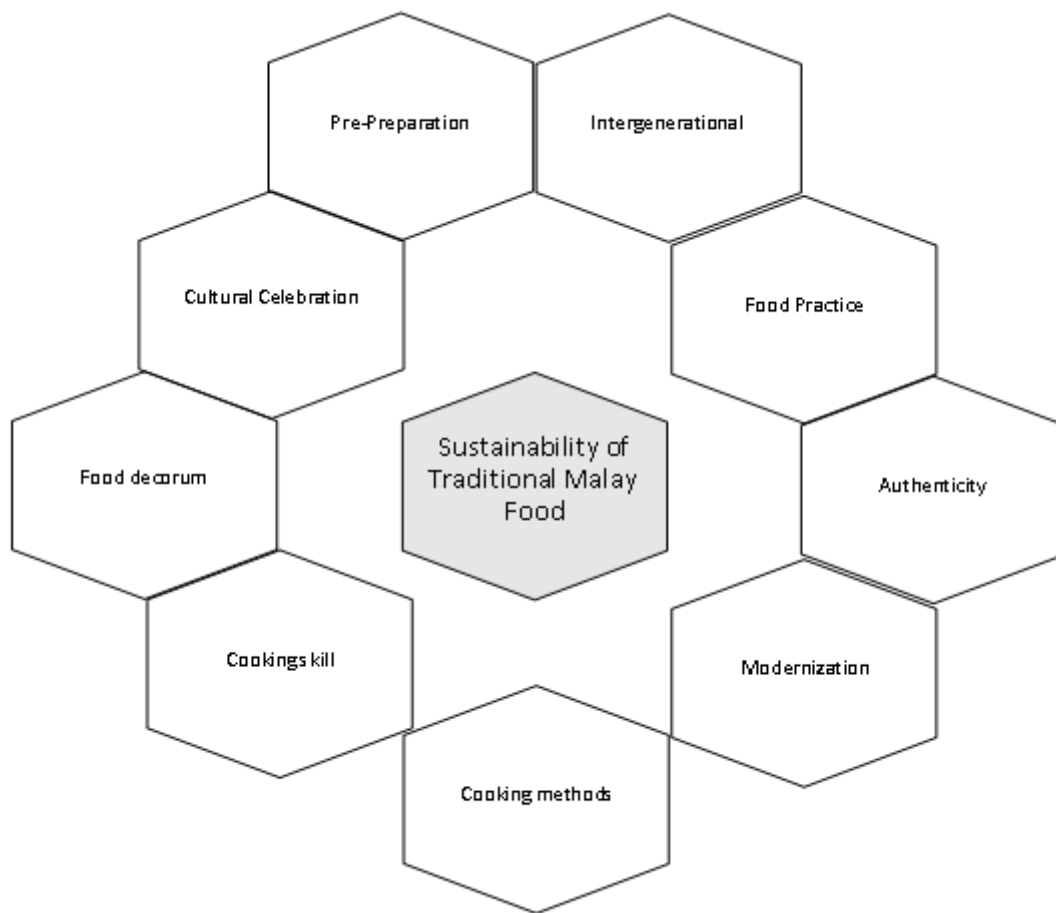


Figure 2: Key Factors in sustainability of Traditional Malay Food

DISCUSSION

In any cultural society, it is vital to preserve their traditional food especially for the Malay community. One of the most efficient ways to achieve the preservation of traditional food provisioning methods is through the sharing and transfer of skills and knowledge across generations. Mothers and daughters agreed that encouraging children to be in the kitchen during the festive season, before leaving the house for higher education, marriage, or working could help preserve those treasures. The mothers, on the other hand, were more concerned that the young generation should have the same ability to prepare and practice Malay dishes as their generation. Thus, women as an important intergenerational food knowledge medium in the Malay community significantly helps the process of Malay traditional food knowledge transfer from one generation to another. All mothers acknowledged that the current wave of modernization and advancement has a minor effect on the traditional culinary traditions of the Malay people. It is thought that the production of traditional Malay food has been somewhat diminished and transformed by the commercialization of ingredients and convenience food products. There are many different types of improvised ingredients available for daily and festival food preparation, including powders, sachets, frozen, refrigerated, and dried ingredients. Changes in lifestyle, education, and the economy all contribute to social progress that slows down the pace of change. Participation of the younger generation during holidays and religious festival seasons support the individual responsible for being in the kitchen and compliant with their mothers. Their Malay traditional cooking skills significantly improve after having their own family, including cooking, as their responsibility. In conjunction with food decorum, Malay ceremonial occasions such as Hari Raya demonstrate the proper ways of preparing, serving, and consuming food. Festive celebrations such as Hari Raya and wedding ceremonies are the most significant events in Malay culture, inviting members of the community to attend and bestowing blessings upon the host. Despite the fact that we live in a modern world, this image shows that Malay people, particularly those in the village, still eat cross-legged on the floor. Eating like this reflects unity and harmony among the communities of Malay people.

This study offers valuable implications for both theoretical development and practical applications. Theoretically, it recognizes the necessity in preserving and key factors towards sustainability of Malay traditional food in today's modern and dynamic environment. Practically, such information is significant for the government and local authority as a strong basis in establishing a policy which will benefit the preservation of local heritage and traditional food. Additionally, the continuation of Malay traditional food reflects a healthy growth of the community that is still holding to their traditional roots. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the reliance on secondary data from 11 articles may introduce biases related to the searching keywords utilization. The keywords selection reflects general yet limited to particular words and no alternative and synonym was used to expand the search parameter. Secondly, the study's focus on the understanding of the sustainability in Malay traditional food and may not address other potential findings such as consumer's behavior, government policy and other socioeconomic factors. Finally, the data search within 2013 to 2023 and selective database may not fully explain the full extent of this topic where changing trends and dynamics of Malay traditional food may present.

CONCLUSION

Today Malay traditional food has endured changes of time and dynamic in modernization. The Malay community are still practicing traditional food culture and the knowledge has kept the root of cuisine continue up until today's generation. These systematic analyses successfully unfold prominent factors in the sustainability of Malay traditional food. Continuation of these themes will ensure Malay traditional food will firm its root within the Malay community in years to come. Future research could further verify this finding through primary data collection which will help to further validate the thematic findings. Potential research could focus on the factors and expand it into different settings or communities. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of these factors may broaden the understanding of which key factors are most significant for the sustainability of traditional food. Comparative study across different races and ethics give more colors to future research.

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Authors' Contribution

NNM carried out the introduction, literature review and writing-original draft. AR wrote a data methodology section. MA wrote the finding and discussion section. All authors collected and refined the data and performed the data analysis using PRISMA. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

Author Biographies

Nur Nadia Maisarah Mohd Fisol is a Culinary Arts lecturer of Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management at the Universiti Teknologi Mara Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. She holds a Master in Food service Management and Bachelor Science of Culinary Arts Management from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). Current research interest in (1) Gastronomy and (2) Food Heritage.

Ahmad Redhuan Abu Bakar is a Culinary Arts lecturer of Faculty Hotel and Tourism Management at the Universiti Teknologi Mara Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. He holds a Master in Gastronomy (UiTM). Current research interests in (1) Gastronomy, (2) Sociology and (3) Halal.

Mas Affandy bin Mashuri is a lecturer in the Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Art Management, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara Cawangan Pulau Pinang. He holds a

Bachelor Science of Culinary Arts Management and holds a Master's Degree in Hospitality Management from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). He has been involved in innovation projects nationally. Among his areas of expertise are (1) Culinary Art & Gastronomy, (2) Food Innovation, (3) Food Styling & (4) Restaurant Kitchen Operation.

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